

May 2, 2010 - Rev. Anne E. Hodges-Copple [PDF] (Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35)

I have had a lovely week. Part of the highlight of this last week was that on Wednesday I was able to attend a tribute luncheon for Frank DePasquale. And when I get a chance to go celebrate one of our parishioners -- really, I would like to be invited to all of your tribute luncheons because you all deserve one, but Frank got one -- and it was a glorious way of celebrating the way that Frank has been involved with the very texture, fabric, brick, mortar, mind and body and spirit of Durham over his career as an architect. Kind of like someone I know who takes old things and makes them new and makes them serve the community. It was a wonderful time. And then I got in my car and I drove to the beach. I went on retreat. I stepped back for a little while. Along with some of the rest of you, we went to the Springtide annual retreat at Trinity Center down at the beach, down along Salter Path right there on Bogue Island. And had a lovely time of stepping away from it all.

And one of the readings that we spent a lot of time with on this retreat was another time that Jesus took his own disciples away to a deserted place to kind of get away to reflect. And so following the pattern of our bishop who sometimes sets the lectionary aside and uses a different text, I am going to invite us to think about a different text this morning. And I'm not going to read it to you. I'm going to re-tell it to you.

It's a very familiar story. It is the story of when Jesus noticed that his apostles had been out preaching and teaching and working very hard on behalf of the kingdom and they came back and they were tired. And Jesus said, "Well, let's go away. We will go off to a deserted and quiet place where we can pray and share what's going on in our ministry." And they got in their boat. They sailed across the Sea of Galilee. They got to the deserted place and found 5,000 other people who had followed Jesus. People who were hungry to know more about his message of love, of reconciliation, of acceptance and redemption. Anxious and hungry to know more. Hungry to be in his presence. And Jesus, scripture says, had compassion on them. And he taught and he taught. And the disciples noticed that the people were getting hungrier and hungrier. And not just for the Word. It was the end of the day. They were worried about food. There were no side taco stands waiting for concessions. And Andrew comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, send the people away for they are hungry and they need to be able to go and go get some food." And Jesus said to him, "Well, you feed them." And Andrew and the other disciples respond, "Well, there's just not enough money in the budget to feed -- really, we don't have all those denier to feed these people." And Jesus said, "Well, what do you have?" I kind of picture the disciples looking at one another like, "Well, I have a loaf. Well, I've got one, too." And all the sudden there were, for 5,000 people, five loaves and two fishes. Well, obviously not enough, right? And Jesus said, "That'll do." And Jesus took those small amount of loaves -- and think about the disciples who, noting they were surrounded by 5,000 hungry people -- I mean, how brave and courageous would that be to bring out what you have? Stepping out in faith, and maybe with a little fear. Jesus then does something that's become very, very familiar to us. Jesus took the bread, what little there was, and the fish, he blessed it, he broke it and he gave it all away. Jesus took what little the disciples could initially come up with, as inadequate as it seemed, and miraculously it multiplied.

I don't dare, and don't need, to explain or know how it came about. But Jesus said to the family, "Sit down in small groups out here." They did. It's in the scripture. Just like we did this morning. "Sit down in your small groups. And spread out what you have and see what you can take, bless, break and share." Jesus has this uncanny way of doing this, of showing up at places where something is running out or there's not enough. Remember that wedding at Cana? Out of wine -- oh, no. Or remember several times in the scripture the disciples have fished all night and their nets are empty, they can't get anything. There's not enough. There won't be enough. Jesus says, "Try again." And where there was nothing or so very little, it becomes miraculously more than enough. From scarcity to abundance. "Whatever you have," Jesus says to his flock, "I can change it into more than enough."

What do we have? Take a look at it. Sometimes it doesn't seem like much, does it? Especially during a recession. We have a little and we're worried about protecting what we do have. But take a look at what we have again and when you look at it, do you see your blessings? Do you see all that God has given you to work with? Gather up what little you have, then say a blessing over it. Don't bemoan -- I'm saying this to myself -- I need to not bemoan what I don't have and rejoice and give thanks for what I do have. I don't need to look over at what my neighbor has, but focus on what I have and give thanks and ask God to thank it and offer it back to God. Say to God, "Take this that I have and break it."

What does that mean to break it? I think it means to see what we have can be broken up, divided up. Broken into new opportunities and potential and gifts that we didn't even know we had until we were willing to give them away. Take, bless, break and then give. Share what we have. Give what we have and suddenly see how God takes what little we have and changes it into more than what we need.

Our parish has lots of experiences with these mysterious moments of multiplication. The very founding of this parish was a real struggle. Families without very much, post-war families in the 1950's left a perfectly wonderful downtown affluent church, took their meager possessions and founded a new church in a little bitty house. Then they moved to a slighter little bigger house and then a small church and eventually their small giving has multiplied into our beautiful large parish family. Let's think about the multiplication that our amazing youth have pulled off. How do youth come up with about \$20,000 to go and be in ministry with really poor students at Holy Cross Anglican School? Well, they have multiplied. They took the leaves in our yards, they took the grime and dust off our decks, they took the garbage from our garage and turned into a yard sale. And our youth, without touching the operating budget of the Episcopal Church, have raised all that they need to raise so that they can go and take their blessings and have their hearts lifted up and broken open with community of Christians in Belize and be changed and come back with more and more and more to give.

Now, my favorite recent example is I got a call from a parishioner yesterday who will remain nameless. He was giddy. He was perfectly giddy. He was describing to me -- well, first of all, how there had been a plan, a plan that was going to cost a lot of money to do some more conservation work around our facility so that we could be good stewards of what God has given us. And we applied for some grant money to do some very complicated and expensive changes and updates particularly to our lighting systems. Something about decaying, leaking, dangerous

ballasts in our lighting fixtures. And we were given a grant. But guess what? It wasn't enough. It was short by about \$3,000. So our very task oriented members -- very task oriented, very organized members got together, took what little they had -- maybe scary amount of little -- knowledge of electricity, got themselves trained, took their valuable time and a little bit of talent and have miraculously multiplied their hours into huge savings for our church, to safer facilities for our school and our schoolchildren. But what this guy was so giddy about -- he said, "Anne, I met these people. We had such a good time. I had more people than I knew what to do with. And they were just great people." I'm like, "Well, what did you expect?" It's a multiplication of every little bit of time, of talent and of treasure that we've been given if we're just brave enough to bring it forward.

I could go on and on. I don't know how a small group of women fed 80 hungry clergy a couple of months ago. I don't know how we do it around here, but we do it again and again and again. Back in March, and really before that, we took the vestry on retreat. And we sat back and we thought -- we went away to a very nice deserted place out in Orange County, right on the line. Beautiful setting. And we gathered around as a portion of the body of Christ and we looked at what we had in our budget and we said, "Well, it's not enough. It's not enough. It's not enough by 30 to maybe even \$50,000. It's not enough." And yet somehow this did not panic us. We did not decide we were in a crisis. We did decide that we needed to gather the people and to sit down and to start to think about what do we have. What can we find in our lives? What do we have more to offer our part of the communion of saints? What blessings do we want to gather up and then set out upon the Lord's table? And how might we invite others into that conversation?

It's not a crisis. You know, frankly, if St. Luke's closed tomorrow, the world would go on, the church would go on. God doesn't need me to give more. I do, because this is the place I need. Giving is not about what somebody else needs. It's what we need. To see what God will take from our lives, bless, break open and give back. Each of us must look to our own households to figure what we can bring forward. This is hard. It's prayerful. And I tell you, I believe it is exciting. I'll figure out my household. I'm just asking you to figure out yours. Where in your time and your talent and your treasure is there more and more to offer for the ministry that's known as St. Luke's?

I want to close with a prayer from Saint Teresa of Avila that reminds us when we're wanting to run to Jesus to solve it all, as we should, exactly where we're going to see Jesus. Let us pray. Christ has no body now on earth but yours. No hands but yours. No feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the earth. Yours are the feet by which he is to go about doing good and yours are the hands by which he is to bless us now. Amen.